

**Amendments to the Specification**

Please replace paragraph [0003] with the following amended paragraph:

Basketball and ~~Slamball~~ SLAMBALL™ have captured the interest of spectators and players of varying levels of skill, from beginner to competitive professionals. Any person desiring to develop the skills required of either game may have a difficult time doing so alone. Finding an available court is sometimes challenging for basketball players, but it is especially challenging for ~~Slamball~~ SLAMBALL™ players, who must find a court having a combination of rigid and elastic surfaces that will accommodate practice, training and/or play. Players improve through repeated practice and by receiving instruction from others more knowledgeable than themselves, and in particular by receiving feedback regarding their own performance through criticism and/or objective measurements.

Please replace paragraph [0004] with the following amended paragraph:

Ball game players often find that they do not receive sufficient shooting or slamming practice during normal team practices. Thus, there is a continuing need for persons desiring to improve their skills to practice independently and in a time-efficient manner, where a great deal of time is not lost chasing after loose balls rather than shooting or slamming. Several types of basketball retrieval apparatuses that automatically return a ball to a player are known in the art, but none address the court availability or performance improvement quantification problems, *i.e.* they do not address the need to objectively measure performance during either a practice session or an actual game. There are player skill parameters, referred to herein as "metrics", for which traditional means for measuring performance (*e.g.*, a stopwatch) are insufficient. In the games of basketball and ~~slamball~~ SLAMBALL™, these include measures of the vertical heights from a playing surface that a player attains, as well as statistics related to successful and unsuccessful slam-dunks. Means for quantifying such skills in the context of a practice session or an actual game would be highly desirable.

Please replace paragraph [0007] with the following amended paragraph:

The present invention provides a basketball and/or ~~slamball~~ SLAMBALL™ court system enabling practice and skills development. The court system may be used by a single player or

multiple players on the same court, or in alternative embodiments, one or more players on one court may compete against one or more players on a different court.

Please replace paragraph [0009] with the following amended paragraph:

Game courts may also be used by competing teams of offensive and defensive players on the same court, or by competing teams on different courts (*i.e.*, in multi-court embodiments.) For example, two teams simultaneously competing against one another with appropriate offensive and defensive metrics can also use a two-court embodiment. Any number of courts can be included in the system, in configurations of competition and practice as desired. In practice mode, an automatic ball feeder delivers a basketball to a player at a selected speed and trajectory to a desired point.

Please replace paragraph [0010] with the following amended paragraph:

In a basic form, the system includes a playing area including a planar playing surface (such as a basketball or ~~Slamball~~SLAMBALL™ court), a hoop above the playing surface through which players attempt to shoot or slam a ball, and an automatic ball feeder that only delivers balls if the player(s) has paid for the privilege of using the court. The ball feeder operation is controlled through a mechanism, which is preferably but not necessarily a computer, that receives an indication from a payment receiving means of whether sufficient payment has been received. Payments may be made in any payment form, such as tokens, credits, cash, credit cards and arcade-type cards, and can entitle players to a certain amount of system use time, a certain number of delivered balls (determined by a ball counter), or any other predetermined measure of system usage. It is preferred to have some type of sectioning means surrounding the playing area for preventing loose balls from traveling too far, perhaps into adjacent playing areas.

Please replace paragraph [0011] with the following amended paragraph:

The playing surface may comprise a typical basketball (parquet) floor, or alternatively a resilient surface adjacent one or more deformable elastic surfaces, such as trampolines that are

well known in the art. Trampoline construction is well known, involving a sturdy membrane or fabric suspended by a plurality of coil springs each attached to the fabric on one end and to a stationary element on their respective other ends. A detailed description of ~~Slamball~~SLAMBALL™ court surfaces may be found in U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2003/0013560. Artisans will appreciate that other materials may be used in the construction of the deformable surfaces while remaining within the scope and intent of the invention. For the protection of leaping players, it is preferred to dispose a layer of padding about the perimeter of the deformable surfaces, *i.e.* at the interfaces of the resilient and deformable surfaces. The deformable surfaces can exhibit a variety or uniformity of shapes, such as squares, rectangles, triangles, circles, ellipsoids, trapezoids, hexagons, and octagons.

Please replace paragraph [0016] with the following amended paragraph:

As mentioned above, the invention provides several configurations including multiple playing areas, which may be used independently or in combinations for competition. The multiple playing areas are, in some configurations, defined by a large single playing surface having multiple courts separated from one another by a sectioning means. The sectioning means may comprise a net, wall or some other type of divider that separates players and prevents loose balls from traveling to other courts, or alternatively the sectioning means may comprise a simple marking on the surface that does not present a physical impediment to players who wish to play a "full court" version of basketball or ~~Slamball~~SLAMBALL™.

Please replace paragraph [0021] with the following amended paragraph:

Hoop **6** is located at an elevated position above the court **4**, and is typically accompanied by a backboard **14**. With reference to **Figure 1B**, the hoop and backboard are shown supported by a stand ~~6416~~, which is preferably adjustable (from position **A** to position **B**) in order to vary the vertical height of the hoop in order to make passing, dunking or 'slamming' a ball through the hoop more or less difficult. This could be accomplished through use of a hydraulic piston **17**. Note that although all support means for the hoop and backboard illustrated and described are floor-mounted, the invention is not so limited - support and adjustment means could easily be ceiling-mounted. The vertical hoop height of a player's slam may be a factor in assessing the

player's performance in a practice session or game. In certain configurations, reflected in **Figure 1C**, hoop **6** is optionally adjustable from a horizontal position **A** to a vertical position **B** in order to prevent use of the system beyond the allotted time. In such systems, hoop **6** is hingeably connected to backboard **14** and one or more hydraulic pistons **19** operate to reposition the hoop **6** as desired.

Please replace paragraph [0026] with the following amended paragraph:

**Figure 3** illustrates an alternative configuration of the elasticity control means. In this configuration, the hydraulic pistons **26'** are horizontally disposed with respect to the trampoline material **20** and springs **22**. Here, each of the springs **22** are connected to the material **20** on one end, and the other end of each spring is connected to a inflexible surface **32** that, in turn is connected to the horizontally-disposed hydraulic pistons **26'32**. In normal operation, hydraulic pistons **26'**, while contacting surface **32**, exert no displacing force on the surface **32**. Thus, surface **32** is unmoving and a constant repulsive force is provided by the springs. When adjustment to decrease the elasticity of the trampoline is desired, the piston rod **34** is extended to displace surface **32** (for example, from position **A** to position **B**, in the direction of arrow **36**) such that the springs **22** will not be extended to the same degree as they would be had surface **32** not been displaced. This has the effect, in turn, of reducing the reflexive, elastic force provided by the trampoline to a player jumping thereupon.

Please replace paragraph [0028] with the following amended paragraph:

With reference again to **Figure 1A**, ball feeder **8** delivers the balls to players on the court through ejector port **38**. Various forms of ball propulsion are employed in alternative embodiments, including, for example, catapults, pneumatic blowers and spinning wheels, etc. U.S. Patent Nos. 5,310,176, 5,364,091, 5,776,018, 5,980,391, 5,681,043, 4,699,386, 5,769,064, 4,013,292, 4,714,248, 4,678,189, 4,579,340, 3,777,655 and 6,280,352 present various ball feeding technology that can be adapted for use in system **2**. (To the extent necessary, the teachings of these references are incorporated by reference.) The ball delivery speed and trajectory can be controlled either by computer **10** or by the players themselves through adjustment of ball feeder **8** controls proximate the players. In a preferred embodiment, the balls

that pass through the hoop 6 are captured by a ball collector 42 for conveyance back to the ball feeder 8, where they are received at ball input port 40. A plurality of balls are preferably employed in order to effect rapid play or practice, with extra balls stored in reserve within ball feeder 8. In certain multi-court arrangements of the system (described below), a single ball feeder 8 equipped with multiple ball collectors 42 and input ports 40 may serve a corresponding multitude of courts. In a preferred embodiment, the ball collector 42 consists of a tubular section of netting of sufficient dimensions to convey a basketball or similarly-sized ball to the input port 40 that is attached or proximate to the bottom of the hoop 6. The ball feeder 8 may include a counter 48 that keeps track of the number of balls either returning through the input port 40 (or, is positioned proximate the hoop 6, balls passing therethrough) and/or delivered through the ejector port 38. This information is then output to computer 10, where it is used in computing player metrics or determining whether the predetermined system usage paid for by the player(s) has been met. The ball feeder 8 can be set at any speed, direction, and angle to simulate a basketball pass. If the participant successfully slams the ball through the hoop 6, ball collector 42 captures the ball for conveyance to the ball feeder. If the participant misses and does not successfully slam the ball into the basket, the participant is allowed to retrieve the ball and tries again. Only upon a successful attempt will a new ball be released to the participant.

Please replace paragraph [0034] with the following amended paragraph:

With reference to **Figures 5A-B**, the system 2 can alternatively be arranged in a multi-court configurations. In **Figure 5A**, each court is part of a single continuous planar playing surface that is sectioned into multiple playing areas 58 by one or more vertical partitions 60. Each playing area 58 includes some or all of the automated features described above (although for clarity purposes they are displayed in detail for only one playing area.) In the multi-court embodiment, groups of players on one court may "play against" groups of players on different courts by comparing their relative metrics. The partition 60 may be a net or wall preventing balls and players from traversing into other courts. A partition is not required for some games -- for example, a "full court" game of basketball or ~~Slamball~~SLAMBALL™ requires that there be no physical boundary between two opposed courts. **Figure 5B** illustrates an alternative multi-court configuration of system 2, wherein each of the multiple courts share a common ball

collection and feeder mechanism **62**. Ball collection and feeder mechanism **62** allows independent, simultaneous play and/or practice on each of the courts.

Please replace the Abstract with the following amended Abstract:

A ball game system for training and/or play comprising a one or more playing areas suitably large to accommodate running and jumping players, each the playing areas including adjacent surface areas forming a court and having distinctly different properties, such as a first surface suitable for bouncing a ball and a second surface comprised of a deformable elastic material. The system includes an automatic ball feeder and sensors for monitoring the positions and trajectories of one or more players and/or balls on the court. Options include visual displays and/or audio outputs reflective of player performance, and payment-driven operation of the system components, including a means for adjusting the degree of rebound provided by the deformable elastic surface(s).